

ELECTIONWATCH SOMALILAND



Somaliland Pre-Election Watch: June 2010 Presidential Election

Somalilanders will go to the polls on June 26, 2010, to elect their nation's president for only the second time since declaring independence from Somalia in 1991. Although no other nation officially recognizes Somaliland as a sovereign country, Somaliland citizens remain committed to developing democratic institutions and carving out a peaceful, self-sufficient nation in the Horn of Africa. For Somalilanders, the upcoming presidential election is a crucial step in their nation's democratic development. The occasion marks the first time that a President will have to defend his term in office through a reelection campaign, and, depending on the outcome, Somaliland could witness its first democratic transition of power from one political party to another. Additionally, a transparent and peaceful election would send a powerful message to the international community at a time when the struggling Transitional Federal Government in Mogadishu is on the brink of collapse.

The long-awaited election date was announced in May 2010, as the Somaliland citizenry was growing increasingly impatient with a government and National Electoral Commission (NEC) that had originally promised presidential election in August 2008. President Dahir Riyale Kahin, who was elected in Somaliland's first multiparty election in 2003, was supposed to serve a five-year term, but instability in the eastern Sanaag and Sool regions led the upper house of Parliament, or Guurti, to extend the incumbent's term for one year. A new election date was set for March 15, 2009. The opposition heavily criticized the decision, but in a compromise with the Guurti the opposition finally agreed that the election would be held on April 6. The agreement crumbled after the Guurti rescheduled the date several more times, and then voted to extend the current president's term to September 29, 2009.

In response to the numerous delays, the Peace, Unity, and Development Party (KULMIYE), Somaliland's main opposition party, publically stated it would not support the decision and would no longer recognize President Dahir Riyale's Kahin's government after April 6, 2009. Somaliland's other opposition party, For Justice and Development (UCID), also denounced the Guurti's decision as unconstitutional. President Riyale issued a decree setting September 27 as the new date for the election. Amidst rising political tensions in July 2009, all three political parties signed an electoral code of conduct in an effort to move forward with the electoral processes and secure the date for September.

Again, the electoral commission went back on its word and announced that the election could not be held in September due to "current political, economic and technical conditions," and a new date was not announced. President Riyale subsequently asked the Guurti for yet another term extension since it was set to expire on September 29. The Guurti originally denied the extension, but decided to grant it during a second round of voting, provided that the government adhered to a six-point proposal to organize the next elections. The agreement included a guarantee from the existing government that it would not seek a

further extension of office, and that a new NEC would recommence the disputed and delayed voter registration process.

Somaliland politicians expected the election to be held in January 2010, then April 2010 but it soon became clear this date would also be missed due to setbacks with correcting an erroneous voter list. The new NEC officials steadily worked to eliminate duplicate entries, and in April announced that 1.1 million people had been included in the finalized voter list. Ballot boxes promptly arrived from Denmark, and the NEC issued new voter registration cards during the second half of May. On May 15, President Riyale issued a decree setting the election date to June 26; a date proposed by the Electoral Commission in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of Somaliland's independence from the United Kingdom.

Evolution on the Party Scene

Political parties were introduced in August 2000 with the passage of new legislation, which specified that only the three parties that received the most votes in local government elections (held in late 2002) would finally be registered as official political parties. These three parties would be the only parties allowed to compete in any future Somaliland elections. This means no independent candidates are able to run.

The three parties that emerged with the most votes in 2002 were the United Peoples' Democratic Party (UDUB), KULMIYE and UCID. Despite the existence of opposition groups in Somaliland all three parties appear to support the same agenda: gaining international recognition for Somaliland and striving for continued economic and political development. Currently the UDUB party holds the executive branch of government with incumbent candidate President Dahir Rayale Kahin vying for another term in office, while the legislature is dominated by the more powerful of the two opposition parties, KULMIYE. The legislature is a bi-cameral body made up of an elected House of Representatives and a clan appointed House of Elders, or Guurti.

UDUB, the current ruling party, played a key role in Somaliland's peaceful transition after the civil war and built confidence in Somaliland's political institutions both at home and abroad. However, due to continual delays in the presidential election, the general public has become impatient with the ruling party and its support base has diminished. Many local leaders have criticized UDUB for poor service delivery and ineffective leadership.

Somaliland's main opposition party is KULMIYE. The party's public appeal is linked directly to its chairman's credentials as a leader of the Somali National Movement liberation struggle, which contributed to the overthrow of Somalia's military government in the north and the eventual declaration of Somaliland independence. The party's campaign strategy involved casting itself as the standard-bearer of the freedom fighters or mujahidin, while painting UDUB leadership as holdovers from the former Siad Barre military regime of Somalia.

Somaliland's third party, UCID, emerged from a series of political discussions and debates among the Somaliland intellectuals in the diaspora, particularly those living in Scandinavian countries. Its founders believe strongly in the role of political parties in state-building and democratization in Somaliland. The party mainly draws its support from the youth, women and minorities who have had limited access to politics and decision-making opportunities.

The UCID party currently holds 21 out of 80 seats in the House of Representatives, although it only received 15.8 percent of the vote in the previous presidential election.

The Campaign

As stipulated in the Somaliland constitution, citizens will choose from three candidates who have been nominated by their respective political parties, and the candidate with the largest number of votes will win in a single round of elections. Somaliland's campaign regulations reflect a conscientious effort to reduce violence among supporters of the various political parties.

During the campaign period, the three political parties were allotted seven specific days each on which to conduct their campaign activities, starting on June 3 and ending on June 23. No two parties were allowed to campaign on the same day. Rallies, debates and any other public form of campaigning could only be conducted on the party's specified days in an effort to avoid the possibility of violent outbreak between competing party supporters.

A subject of utmost importance to the Somaliland government is peace. Given the violent crises raging for years in much of south-central Somalia, it is a source of great pride and concern to Somaliland that the government upholds a peaceful and inclusive electoral process. Fortunately, campaigning was relatively peaceful with only minor reports of intimidation by opposition groups.

Interestingly, the three candidates currently vying for the Somaliland presidency are the same three candidates who competed in the 2003 presidential race. The incumbent, President Dahir Rayale Kahin, represents the UDUB party. Riyale's main competitor in this election is Mr. Ahmed Mohamed Mohamoud (Silanyo) from KULMIYE. Mr. Mohamed lost the 2003 elections by only 80 votes. The UCID political party nominated Mr. Faisal Ali Warabe as its presidential candidate.

IRI in Somaliland

Since 2002, the International Republican Institute (IRI) has played an active role supporting Somaliland's democratic development. Having just celebrated their independence in 1991, Somaliland's leaders were eager to strengthen their new nation, and welcomed IRI's assistance whole-heartedly. IRI's program quickly expanded to provide support to three key institutions: Somaliland's parliament, the three main political parties and civil society.

In response to Somaliland's first ever parliamentary elections in September 2005, IRI fielded an international delegation to assess the election process in roughly 10 percent of all polling stations throughout the country. IRI trained political party agents to monitor polling stations for Somaliland's long awaited presidential election.



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